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Raymond Robins

To the Progressives of the
Country.



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Raymond Robins

Chairman of the Progressive National Convention

To the Progressives of the Country

“For myself, I gladly enlist with the great majority of the Progressives of the nation under the leadership of CHARLES EVANS HUGHES.”

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TO MY FELLOW PROGRESSIVES:

For some years prior to 1912 in common with other progressive citizens, I had hoped for a new cleavage in American political life—a cleavage that would bury the dead issues of 1860, wipe out sectional lines and prejudices—and comprehending the vital social and economic issues of the twentieth century, would divide American political parties along true lines of honest progressive and honest conservative sentiment. When Colonel Roosevelt voiced this need and desire and declared himself as willing to serve in realizing a genuine progressive and liberal party, I in common with over four million voters responded to his call.

In our first campaign while the actual vote was an extraordinary testimony to Colonel Roosevelt's personal popularity, we elected no single Progressive governor, nor legislature, nor sufficient members to be even a balance of power in Congress. This however was no discouragement to those Progressives who did not seek office and were ready to fight on through any number of defeats to gain a genuine victory. In 1914 we had a real test of the Progressive voters of 1912 and the willingness of the American people to use a new party in the practical solution of the problems of our political life. Generally throughout the nation the Progressive candidates—embracing its most gifted leaders and all generously supported by Colonel Roosevelt and as a rule fairly treated by the daily press—ran a bad third. Nearly three-fourths of the Progressive voters of 1912 refused to support the Progressive candidates in 1914. Moreover the acid test of the party loyalty of the voter is not found in his support of party candidates in a general election, but in his willingness to enroll or register in the primaries of his party. By this test throughout the union the Progressive voters of 1912 declared in overwhelming majority that they regarded the Progressive candidates as the representatives of a protest and not a party—of a mere revolt rather than a permanent political cleavage.

Under our system of government the voters are at last supreme. No gifts of leadership nor merit of program can finally drive the American people into a party against their will. In the 1914 and 1916 primaries the Progressive voters of 1912 deliberately and in overwhelming numbers abandoned the Progressive Party.

The efforts of Colonel Roosevelt's friends to secure his nomination by both the Republican and Progressive conventions was a mere recognition of this fact. Colonel Roosevelt's declination to run as the Progressive candidate only, simply declared his acceptance of the verdict of the voters as delivered by them in the primaries of 1914 and 1916. The refusal of the Progressive National Committee to favor a third ticket candidacy did no more than to make final the judgment entered by the Progressive voters themselves.

While I had hoped against hope that the extraordinary events in this epochal hour might over-rule the verdict of the voters, and under the leadership of Colonel Roosevelt the Progressive Party might yet

dominate the situation, nevertheless, when the Progressive Convention had adjourned and the entire situation was considered—it was manifest that the end which the voters had decreed had come—that the Progressive Party was dead. The Progressive movement and revolt of 1912 having failed as a permanent political party, and the verdict of the voters having been rendered in favor of the Democratic and Republican parties as the instruments of their organized political action; what is the present duty of the men and women who were loyal to the Progressive Party and who believe in Progressive principles? In which of these dominant parties in the long run will Progressive principles find most effective support, and where will the rank and file and leadership of the Progressive Party find largest co-operation in the service of our common country? While this question must at last be settled in the individual mind and heart, we are grateful for honest counsel one with another.

Which Party Holds the Better Hope?

For myself, I cannot determine this question by the merit of candidates and platforms alone. Platforms change with each campaign and leaders come and go. Should we not consider that drift of opinion—almost glacial in slowness and certainty—whereby the permanent voting mass in each party inevitably determines the topography of our political world? Is there not a main current underneath the changing surface eddies, a purpose and tendency of the rank and file voters in the one party as opposed to the other, that abides? If so, which party through such mass drift, such tendency of its permanent rank and file, holds the better hope for Progressive principles in the solution of our domestic problems and international policy? The answer to this question is twofold, first the character and environment of the primary voter mass control, and second the permanent achievements of its leadership.

The primary voter mass control of the Democratic Party is in fifteen southern and southwestern states and in the industrial cities of the nation. The fixed southern control of the Democratic Party is individualistic in its thinking, sectional in its sympathies and inherits a tradition against common labor as servile. The social organization is still semi-patriarchal in the rural communities and the southern environment presents the maximum of natural and cultural resistance to necessary social and industrial standardization. The Democratic primary voter mass control in the industrial cities is the most heterogeneous of our national groups and the excessive pressure of living and industrial conditions renders it the most fertile field for boss control in the service of selfish personal and corporate interests.

The primary voter mass control of the Republican Party is in the rural communities of the central, western and New England states. This group represents the highest literacy in America, is freest from severe social and economic pressure, is in the zone of the greatest natural tendency to industrial standardization and equality of opportunity, and inherits the tradition of Lincoln and the men who saved the union.

The Republican Party—though often dominated by the masters of special privilege and made by them the instrument of vast exploitation—has a rank and file of men and women who have proved

their capacity to reject false or dishonest leadership. Conceived in moral revolt against human slavery, it was born, baptized and nurtured in the supreme national struggle to maintain the national heritage and fulfill the promise of equal opportunity to every citizen. Is not its rank and file best calculated to support a leadership that will create a national mind and conscience, and having preserved the integrity of the nation against the heresy of secession, will it not develop and maintain a progressive national program of social and economic organization?

Test of Republican Achievement

Let us now turn to the test of actual achievements in progressive legislation and administration. The freest and most progressive state in this union is California. Eight years ago it was a rotten borough and had been under shameless and corrupt corporation and boss control for a generation. Twenty years ago able and honest progressive Democrats were fighting in that state for reform. They led in the education of the people but the rank and file of the Democratic Party refused to follow their leadership. How was the actual deliverance of California achieved? By the rank and file of the Republican voters under the leadership of Hiram W. Johnson. The second freest state in this union is Wisconsin. Twenty years ago the brewery ring of Milwaukee and the railroad ring of Madison controlled that state. Which party redeemed Wisconsin? The rank and file of the Republican Party under the leadership of Robert M. LaFollette. After long years of shameless corruption and misgovernment Pennsylvania has made a notable advance toward decent government and progressive policies in the last two years. Here again the rank and file of the Republican voters under the leadership of Governor Brumbaugh is breaking boss control of government in the Keystone State. When New Hampshire broke the bonds of her railroad ring how was that victory won? Through Robert P. Bass and Winston Churchill supported by the rank and file of the Republican Party.

My home state of Illinois is an illuminating example of the general experience. We have had able progressive Democratic leadership and within the past decade have won both the city and the state governments. Yet permanent gains for progressive principles have been practically nil. A fatal incapacity for efficient administration or fundamental progressive legislation seems to rest upon the Democratic Party in Illinois. After sixteen years, during twelve of which I served with the Progressive Democrats, the Democratic Party is more completely under the control of a corporation boss who represents the worst in our political system than at any other time in twenty years. The present administration at Washington has helped rather than hindered the growth of this boss control of the Democratic Party in Illinois. The progressive Democrats of Illinois are a heartsick minority. The progressive Republicans are a militant and—properly organized—will be a triumphant majority. The final regeneration of the government of this state will have to be won by the leadership of progressives in the Republican Party supported by its rank and file.

When the hour came to break the control of the corrupt plutocracy

and the bosses over the national government, again it was the rank and file of the progressive Republican voters that sustained the leadership in the White House and Congress which laid the foundation of effective progressive opinion and finally culminated in the revolt of 1912. It was the fear of this progressive spirit that nominated Mr. Wilson over the choice of the Democratic rank and file in the Baltimore convention; that maintained President Wilson's control over Congress; that dictated the progressive planks in the Democratic platform in St. Louis and nominated Mr. Hughes in the Republican Convention at Chicago. It was progressive Republicans that furnished 95 per cent. of the leadership and 80 per cent. of the voters for the Progressive candidates in 1912.

Nationalism versus Sectionalism the Issue

The national conscience now aroused must be made effective. It must develop a national mind that will comprehend our social, industrial and military unpreparedness. It must appreciate the domestic injury and national danger that lies in our lack of a definite foreign policy. It must realize that we will be as unprepared for peace as we are unprepared for war. The supreme need in American political life is leadership supported by a voting rank and file that will organize and maintain an adequate, social, industrial and military preparedness, together with a comprehensive foreign policy.

The first step in social preparedness is woman suffrage to protect our children and homes from the incompetence, corruption and vice of our municipal housekeeping.

We need industrial preparedness with a program of standardization in our economic life. For the workers, we need living wages, fair hours of labor, workshop sanitation and fire protection, with accident, sickness, old age and unemployment insurance. Trade agreements and arbitration should take the place of individual exploitation and industrial civil war. For capital, we need the intelligent co-operation of government both at home and abroad. When this war is over we will face the most intense industrial competition that the world of commerce has ever known. A comprehensive protection of the home market and support for American foreign trade is indispensable if we are to preserve industrial prosperity. For both capital and labor, we should develop a progressive policy in taxation that will lift the fiscal burdens of government from labor and enterprise and place them upon monopoly and privilege. Graduated progressive taxation upon incomes, inheritances and land values must be a part of any adequate preparedness program.

We need universal service and military training of the youth of America. This will do more in one generation to break down class and sectional prejudice, develop disciplined, vigorous and efficient citizenship, and to unify the diverse groups of our national life in a vital Americanism than all other forces combined. It will destroy militarism and the military caste, while providing that genuine preparedness for efficiency in time of peace and defense against aggression in time of war which is needed in every citizenship. This is the policy of the labor government of

Australia and the democratic people's government in Switzerland and is worthy of the vigorous support of every informed progressive in America.

We need a comprehensive foreign policy that will accept the facts of the world situation and our obligations under the Monroe Doctrine; the open door in China; and the Exclusion Acts; and prepare adequately to maintain our right part in the world movement, advancing the democratic purpose and human interests in the international field as against the domination of privilege, autocracy and militarism.

Can these imperative national needs be worked out by a states' rights Democratic Party that plans a state dominated militia with its tendency to shiftless incompetence, spoils politics and organized snobbery as a national defense force, at a time of world peril? More and more it becomes plain that most of our pressing problems of large import are national in scope and will yield only to national action. Yet we find in the Democratic Party the modern, and let us hope the last, stronghold of the advocates of local sovereignty. This doctrine of individualism, sectionalism and disunion menaced and almost prevented the freeing of the colonies from foreign dominion. This doctrine well nigh defeated the adoption of a unifying constitution wherein the American nation became a fact. This doctrine after sixty years almost overthrew the national structure in dissension over the issue of slavery. This doctrine since the Civil War has delayed national legislation so urgently needed to solve the problems of pure food, transportation, child labor and conservation. Wherever the fight for more efficient and more humane government has been waged this baneful doctrine of States' Rights has been invoked to rally and shelter the anti-social forces, to arouse sectional bias, local jealousy and all the mean, narrow passions that hold men's eyes upon the ground, when great human needs call upon them to look beyond the rough and dusty roads to the far country that is worth the toil and sacrifice of the long, hard journey.

Can a Progressive Hesitate Long?

Comprehending our national necessities, how can a Progressive hesitate long to choose between the party of nationalism and the party of sectionalism? Should not wise and sincere Progressives go en masse into the Republican primaries, and fighting shoulder to shoulder with progressive Republicans, help and be helped in our common struggle for social and industrial justice in city, state and nation? If this is generally done the common bonds of our fellowship for the past four years will not be broken but rather augmented, and we can continue to work together and bring back a chastened Republican Party to its ancient faith in human rights and national integrity, which made its triumph under Lincoln's leadership the supreme achievement of the Democratic spirit in the history of mankind.

The present leader of the Republican Party won his reputation as the progressive Republican Governor of New York. He there proved himself completely independent of all boss control and demonstrated that he will take advice from many but dictation from none. His words have been made good by deeds. His leadership is the fruit

of the Progressive movement in American politics. His nomination was not two hours old when the most resourceful general of the "old guard" was dropped overboard into political oblivion. The forced retirement of William Barnes, Jr., was the "high sign" to all who wish to know and understand that the control of the Republican Party had passed forever from the "old guard" of 1912. Mr. Hughes's recognition of the Progressives in the appointment of his campaign committee is a guarantee of the good faith in which he appeals for Progressive support.

LaFollette's Endorsement

This estimate of the progressive character of the Republican nominee does not rest upon the testimony alone of his record and his associates. From a statement over the signature of one of the ablest of the progressive leaders in this nation I quote as follows:

"The nomination of Mr. Justice Hughes will be acceptable to the great body of progressive Republicans in this country. . . . He was not the choice of the reactionary element which formed the platform and otherwise controlled the convention. . . . He is able, independent, fearless, and possessed of high public spirit. There is no question of his personal and political integrity, he will go as far as his convictions carry him and no ulterior influence can stop him."

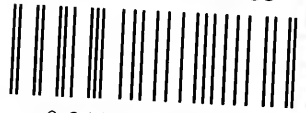
ROBERT M. LAFOLLETTE.

We Progressives stand at the crossroads. American social, industrial and political life has broken down under the old individualistic control. A new national mind and conscience developing social unity, industrial standardization, efficient political honesty; from a self-controlled democracy—this is the goal of our generation in American life. I believe in the character and courage of the nominee of the Republican Party. He is the most conspicuous example in our history of the possibilities that American politics may hold for success in able and unselfish public service. For myself, I gladly enlist with the great majority of the Progressives of the nation under the leadership of CHARLES EVANS HUGHES.

RAYMOND ROBINS.



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